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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the concept of the communication audit, i.e., a fact-finding analysis, interpretation, and reporting process that studies the communication philosophy, structure, flow, and practice of the organization. Reasons for doing a communication audit are identified: (1) to uncover information blockages and organizational hindrances; (2) to expose misunderstandings and help gauge present communication effectiveness; (3) to measure the effectiveness of communication in a large organization or single department; or (4) to measure the effectiveness of the communication skills of a library leader. The key to doing a useful communication audit is explained. A detailed account of a communication audit of the copy cataloguing unit of an academic library system is then provided, and it is noted that the overall objective of this audit was to determine how well employees in the department were communicating by evaluating the quantity, quality, and dynamics of their communication. A sample question from the audit and the rating scale used are provided together with a list of other queries from the questionnaire. Analyses of the responses are presented and the problem-solving process that was used to change problems identified by the audit is described. It is recommended that library leaders audit their own communication occasionally and creatively. (5 references) (CGD)

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DIAGNOSING COMMUNICATION PATHOLOGIES

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DIAGNOSING COMMUNICATION PATHOLOGIES Mueller

Library leaders TELL: "Based on my decision, here is what I want you to do."
Library leaders SELL: "Based on my decision, here is what I want you to do because...."
Library leaders CONSULT: Before I make a decision, I want your input."
Library leaders PARTICIPATE: "We need to make a decision together."
Library leaders DELEGATE: "You make a decision. Produce this result. Ask me before you take any action."

Communication is the medium through which library leaders tell, sell, consult, participate and delegate. It is also the medium through which library leaders:

SHARE THE COMPELLING VISION, a vision so attractive that all want to help to make it happen.
INTEGRATE THE EFFORT so the human energy and resources of all library staff drive in the same direction and all know the role they play in achieving the compelling vision.
SUSTAIN A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT so that library staff are working for the library in an atmosphere of trust, fairness, cooperation and honesty.

Library leaders empower mediators of information at various levels of library leadership. These mediators of information assume socio-emotional leadership as well as task leadership by forming a trust network throughout the structure of the library organization. They provide a shared interpretation of library events. Unless library leaders give library staff such an interpretation they will form their own interpretations which may be inconsistent with the library leader's vision. "Great ideas" may lose their identity by the time they are carried out unless the meaning of the "great ideas" is communicated throughout the library.

Library leaders convey the message that library communication is a shared responsibility of all library staff. The mediators of information also clarify the communication responsibility of each library staff member. Receiving the meaning of messages is a responsibility of all. Providing input is a responsibility of all.

Library leaders recognize the need for harmony between the manifest library, the one that is seen on the "organizational chart"; the assumed library, the one that individuals perceive to be existing; the extant library, the one actually existing as revealed through systematic investigation; the requisite library, the library as it would look if it were in accord with the reality of the situation

in which it exists.1 To align the manifest, the assumed, the extant and the requisite libraries is part of the compelling vision of library leaders.

COMMUNICATION AUDIT

"How are we doing?" "How close are we coming to that alignment?" One way of seeking the answer is the communication audit. The communication audit is a fact-finding, analysis, interpretation and reporting process that studies the communication philosophy, structure, flow and practice of the organization. A communication audit can uncover information blockages and organizational hindrances. It can expose misunderstandings and help gauge present communication effectiveness. It may be broad in scope or limited. It may be used to measure the effectiveness of communication in a large organization or in a single department. It may be a personal communication audit of the library leader.

Why do a communication audit? Library leaders need to determine which individuals are being reached by various information flows, to determine the amount and the frequency of messages sent, to determine the rate at which the messages flow, to determine redundancy, to determine the efficiency of message distribution and the extent of message distortion. Information is provided by

senders at various levels of library leadership. The extent to which the information is received, interpreted correctly, passed on accurately and acted upon properly determines the extent to which communication is taking place within the library.

The "blockage" notion, a useful concept from "Gestalt" psychology, suggests that an organization can be compared to a plumbing system with an interlinked pattern of pipes. Maximum effectiveness comes when the pipes are unblocked. Blockages affect the whole system and reduce overall effectiveness. The system can be improved by clearly identifying the blockages, exploring them to try to understand them, assessing the damage the blockages cause and developing a strategy for change which will reduce or eliminate them.2 The communication audit can be used as an evaluative diagnostic tool to begin the process of identifying blockages.

Situational responsiveness is the key to doing a useful communication audit. This requires an active-reactive, adaptive approach. One must take into account the special and unique people, circumstances and factors in one's environment. One important situational variable is the number of staff members involved. Choosing whether the communication audit will be formative, aimed at improvement, or summative, aimed at making fundamental judgments about the status quo, is a necessary activity

at the outset. The design, the analysis and the findings will all depend on the situation.

MARC DEPARTMENT COMMUNICATION AUDIT

In February 1987 I structured a communication audit for the MARC Department, the copy cataloging unit in the Central Technical Services Division of the University of Wisconsin--Madison General Library System. At the time, the MARC Department had 26 permanent employees working on a flex-time schedule which allowed them to work a 40 hour week from a choice of 90 hours, 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M., Monday through Friday; 10:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. on Saturday and 10:00 A.M. through 9:00 P.M. on Sunday. The flex-time agreement between labor and management provides for core hours only for monthly departmental meetings.

Since I was not in the MARC Department for over half the time department employees could choose to work, I began to wonder how well we were communicating. There were telltale symptoms in the form of open complaints. I recognized the need to look below the surface of these complaints. I needed to make a diagnosis before I could apply a remedy. I wanted to be sure I would not make the mistake of confusing manifestations with the real illness itself. In designing the communication audit for the MARC Department, I

kept in mind that I wanted to evaluate the quantity, quality and dynamics of the MARC Department communication. I wanted to evaluate public communication, interpersonal communication and the affective value of communicators within the MARC Department.

My first objective was to create an awareness in the MARC Department staff that they were being communicated with in many formal and informal ways and to make the MARC Department staff aware of the amount of such communication. In evaluating the effectiveness of communication, never underestimate the importance of telling staff when they are being communicated with, of identifying the ways in which they are being communicated with and of getting them to agree that this is the case. During February 1987 I asked the Assistant Head of MARC and another staff resource person to keep a log of all interactions with MARC staff. A quick analysis of these logs sent all three of us the message that we were giving the most attention to staff members who demanded the most attention. We quickly devised a strategy for a more equitable distribution of our time and energies based on our joint assessment that not all demands were based on need.

The two staples of communication in the MARC Department are the document and the meeting. During February 1987 I kept track of every piece of written communication routed to the MARC Department

staff. As the first part of the written communication audit, I asked the MARC Department staff to evaluate these written communications. I asked the MARC Department staff whether they had read the specific items routed and whether they needed or wanted to see those items.

I kept track of all meetings which had been scheduled for the MARC Department staff, the monthly departmental meeting and several small-group meetings. As the second part of the written communication audit, I asked the MARC Department staff to indicate whether or not they had attended the meetings which were open to them and to evaluate those meetings.

The Assistant Head of MARC and I attend many meetings. I reviewed all of those meetings and asked the MARC Department staff how they wanted to be informed about meetings we attended, whether they preferred receiving minutes, a summary or only that information from each meeting which had a direct impact on their work. The Assistant Head of MARC and I receive minutes and summaries of meetings we do not attend but which may contain relevant information to the MARC Department. I asked the MARC Department staff how they wanted to receive this information, whether they preferred receiving minutes, a summary or only that information from each meeting which had a direct impact on their work.

Mediators of information throughout the library organization are called upon to reconcile varying demands for information. Some staff members want to know everything and some only want to know when the locks have been changed. I was trying to achieve a consensus but I also wanted to be able to identify individual preferences.

In preparing the remainder of the MARC Department communication audit, I incorporated some aspects of the International Communication Association (ICA) communication audit process. The ICA communication audit process uses five measurement tools or approaches: a questionnaire survey, one-on-one interviews, communication network analysis, respondent descriptions of critical communication episodes and a communication diary maintained by each participant. The products of the ICA audit are: an organizational profile of perceptions of communication events, practices, and relationships; a map of the operational communication network, identifying potential bottlenecks and gatekeepers; verbal summaries of successful and unsuccessful communication experiences; an organizational and individual profile of actual communication behaviors, allowing comparisons between actual and perceived communication behaviors; and a set of recommendations.3 The instruments and procedures of this audit are in the public domain.

I adapted the ICA questionnaire survey and the respondent descriptions of critical communication episodes for inclusion in the MARC Department communication audit. A sample question from the audit follows:

In the following categories, please indicate the amount of information you receive now and the amount of information you need to receive.

	THIS IS THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION I RECEIVE NOW					THIS IS THE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION I NEED TO RECEIVE				
	VERY LITTLE	LITTLE	SOME	GREAT	VERY GREAT	VERY LITTLE	LITTLE	SOME	GREAT	VERY GREAT
a. How well I am doing in my my job	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
b. What my job duties are	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
c. What the priorities of my job duties are	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
d. How technological changes affect my job	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
e. How I am being evaluated	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
f. What my performance goals are	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

g. How my job-related problems are being handled	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
h. How GLS decisions are made that affect my job in the MARC Department	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
i. What promotion and advancement opportunities are available in GLS	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
J. How my job relates to the total operation of GLS	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

While you were filling out the previous section, the questions may have brought to mind a recent work-related experience of yours in which communication was particularly ineffective or effective. Please answer the questions below and give a clear summary of that experience.

a. To whom does this experience primarily relate? (circle one)
1.Co-worker
2.Assistant Head of MARC
3.Head of MARC

b. Please rate the quality of communication described in the experience below (circle one):
1.Effective
2.Ineffective

c. To what item in the previous section does this experience primarily relate?_____
(Put in the item number)

Describe the communication experience, the circumstances leading up to it, what the person did that made him/her an effective or ineffective communicator, and the results (outcomes) of what the person did.

Staff were further queried on the amount of information they sent and the amount of information they needed to send; the amount of information or follow-up that is or needs to be taken on the information sent to co-workers, the Assistant Head of MARC, the

Head of MARC, the amount of information being received from co-workers, individuals in other parts of Central Technical Services, Acquisitions and Catalog Editing, from individuals in departments of the General Library System outside Central Technical Services, from the Assistant Head of MARC, the Head of MARC, department meetings, "Announcements," a one-two page weekly newsletter for the MARC Department staff, and the "grapevine." Staff responded to questions about the extent to which the information they received was timely. They responded to questions about relationships to their co-workers and to the Head of MARC and the Assistant Head of MARC. They responded to questions about the level of satisfaction with their jobs.

Finally, the MARC Department staff indicated the amount of information they received from others who spoke to them personally or in small-, medium- or large groups and the amount they received in writing. They were given the opportunity to express a preference for communication face-to-face one-on-one, face-to-face in a small group, face-to-face in a large group or in writing in various situations. They evaluated whether they were satisfied with the amount and kind of communication they had received and indicated specific suggestions for improvements.

Even before the results of the audit were tabulated and the

analysis begun, there were positive side effects. One staff member commented after completing the audit: "That was cathartic. I feel better already." Another asked: "Why did you go through all of this effort? Things aren't that bad." Another added: You've cooled this issue for awhile." And there was the placebo effect, no one complained about how they were being communicated with for several months.

An analysis of the responses revealed agreement on the amount of communication needed and the amount of communication wanted except in the area of job performance and in relationships with the rest of the General Library System. The MARC Department staff saw job performance as not merely the aggregate of skill levels at distinct tasks but also the consistent application of effort and appropriate apportionment of work time. They considered the articulation of job duties and work standards as useful but inevitably general guides for job performance. "I have too much to do and no guide as to what not to do. I am deciding for myself what not to do. I am avoiding those parts of my job I dislike the most," commented one staff member.

The audit further revealed that departmental procedures are clearly understood. It is their application which may provoke concern and desire for consultation. The MARC Department staff

requested an additional resource person who would be in the department while the Head of MARC and the Assistant Head of MARC are attending meetings.

The MARC Department staff sent a clear message that they wanted to feel a part of the larger whole. They wanted a clearer understanding of the processing of library materials which takes place in the other departments of Central Technical Services. They wanted an information-sharing relationship with bibliographers and original catalogers.

The results of the audit provided the MARC Department with a clear vision of a number of problems. We took the approach that problems are simply situations we want to be different and proceeded through an orderly problem solving process. We had a number of problem-solving meetings. We focused on describing the problems objectively. What's happening here? We tried to get agreement on the problem. We described the worst, the best and the current states of the problem. We gathered ideas without criticism, judgment or evaluation. We evaluated alternatives. We looked at combinations of alternatives. We chose solutions. We created a plan.

The plan was a reorganization of the MARC Department from one

large group into four self-managing work groups. These work groups are called VIPS, Vertically Integrated Production Systems. They include all levels of the MARC Department staff and assume responsibility for all the MARC Department activities corresponding to the existing cluster organization. Area Studies, Humanities, Sciences and Social Science clusters as organizational units including bibliographers, member librarians and catalogers are a product of the compelling vision of D. Kaye Gapen, Director of the General Library System at the University of Wisconsin--Madison. Library leaders challenge the structure of the library organization and make changes in that structure to improve library communication.

Our goals were to provide this cluster organization with an area-specific support system of copy catalogers within the existing MARC Department, to provide an additional level of support and training for the MARC Department, to provide an opportunity for the MARC Department staff to relate their work to the work of others, to assume pride and ownership of an end product, and, in so doing, to improve the MARC Department quality control and accountability.

The reorganization of the MARC Department was accomplished in several phases. The constitution of VIPS, the choice of VIPS

leaders and the preparation of VIPS leaders for their new responsibilities were included in the initial phase. The VIPS are composed of a VIPS leader and a distribution of staff classified as Library Services Assistants 2, 3, 4, 5 and Library Associates 1 and 2. VIPS size was determined by the work load of the cluster. The MARC Department staff signed up for the VIPS of their choice. The self-selected groups were formed. Several chose to trade with someone in another VIPS after a trial period. Membership in most VIPS remained stable. VIPS members chose to serve as VIPS leaders on a two-month rotation schedule.

The next phase involved redirection of monographic and serials workflow and the creation of workflows of materials from Acquisitions Department to the appropriate VIPS in the MARC Department. The final phase was a period of observation and adjustment. Responsiveness and adaptiveness were the watchwords of this phase.

Tom Peters in Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution offers as guiding premises for achieving flexibility by empowering people: "involve everyone in everything; use self-managing teams."[4] The self-managing teams have improved communication. Staff members in each VIPS have had the opportunity to get to know one another well and to get to know one

another's tasks. They have developed a unique unit cohesion and esprit de corps. Peer pressure has become a strong motivating factor. These self-managing teams have been in constant, nonabrasive contact with other cluster members throughout the General Library System. They have exchanged visits with cluster members in member libraries of the General Library System and have attended meetings of their parent clusters. They have invited cluster bibliographers to the MARC Department to share their perspectives. MARC VIPS members have, in turn, shared their workflow and procedures with the bibliographers. They have met with cluster catalogers to discuss cataloging priorities. The MARC Department is now preparing for the second communication audit to determine if the perceptions of better communication due to reorganization are accurate.

Shared visions and values bind employees together in collaborative pursuits. Group tasks, complementary goals and shared rewards also play a role. Tasks that require people to exchange ideas and resources reinforce the notion that participants have cooperative goals. According to James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner in The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations, as individuals jointly work together, seeing they need information from one another to be successful, they become convinced that everyone should contribute and that by cooperating

they can all achieve the task successfully. Employees realize their goals are cooperative when day-to-day organizational norms encourage them to share information, listen to one other's ideas, exchange resources and respond to one another's requests through positive interdependence.5

Regardless of the level and the amount of staff involvement in the decision-forming process, trust in the library leader is the key to a healthy library environment. It is necessary for library leaders to build trust to accomplish extraordinary things. Library leaders communicate with words but also with actions. All library leaders need to audit their own communication from time to time:

1. Am I an optimist about the compelling vision?
2. How accountable am I?
3 How credible am I?
4. How predictable am I?
5. Am I a library leader with a good head and a good heart?
6. How do I spend my time?
7. Do I have time for people?
8. What do I reward?

Just telling them what they need to know will no longer do for today's library employees. Library leaders need to understand and affirm the productive cooperative values of library staff,

otherwise unproductive egoistic traits will undermine the library leader's vision. Psychological movements which stress self-affirmation urge today's library employees to stop feeling like a cog in a machine and to start taking responsibility for themselves. They are looking for opportunities for critical thinking, discretion, self-expression and growth in a network of trust. This is the communication challenge for today's library leaders as they go about telling, selling, consulting, participating and delegating and as they share the compelling vision, integrate the effort and sustain a healthy environment.

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